

June 1994

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for local congregations and designed to keep members in touch with the wider church. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

POLLUTING MEXICO – Economic and environmental justice go together, UCC President Paul H. Sherry told an international conference examining industrial pollution in poor neighborhoods along the U.S.-Mexican border.

"As a community begins to degrade environmentally, it has enormous negative impact on the economy of the community," Sherry said at the National Council of Churches sponsored hearing. Cheap labor - \$1.50 a day - has attracted many industries which find it convenient to dump toxic wastes in poor Mexican and Indian neighborhoods that have little political clout. Sherry, chair of the meeting, said the hearings strengthened his resolve to continue pressing for strong environmental measures in the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

A written report of the hearings, along with a video produced by the UCC Office for Communication and study guide written by the UCC Commission for Racial Justice are available from the Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

UCC CELEBRATES THE NEWEST DEMOCRACY – While the change from apartheid to democracy is a South African accomplishment, the UCC can take pride in its role in the struggle for freedom. At least six United Church members were part of an international monitoring team that helped greatly to cool passions during the three day election.

"Our presence made a difference," says Melinda Turner, a foreign policy advocate with the UCC Office for Church and Society and the United Church Board for World Ministries.

"All the crime and violence suddenly quit during the voting," reports Lou Ann Parsons, who for 36 years had struggled against apartheid as a World Board missionary there. "It was a miracle."

Dolly Burwell, a member of Oak Level UCC in Manson, N.C., says she felt "so needed" on election day, because many inexperienced election officials were seeking her advice.

The World Board has had a continuous presence in South Africa since 1835. Its missionaries have picketed, demonstrated, been arrested, denied visas and, in at least one case, expelled as they pressed for racial justice. Board founded Adams College was the first private institution for black males as was Inanda Seminary for females. Chief Albert Luthuli, 1961 Nobel peace prize winner, was educated at Adams and taught there for many years. In 1948 he became one of the first black South Africans to tour the U.S., sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, predecessor agency of the World Board.

In the 1960s, in a then radical approach, the Board took leadership in developing a corporate social responsibility program by which church groups used their ownership of stocks to persuade corporations to make changes for social good. Companies during business in South Africa were the first target.

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MAKING THE RAINBOW BRIGHTER – 1993 was the first year in UCC history in which the majority of new church starts were racial/ethnic congregations. This trend will only get stronger in the 21st century, says Robert Burt of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. Growth is only limited by the number of UCC pastors who are members of the various racial-ethnic groups, understand their cultures and speak their languages. Seems they had the same problem back in the 17th and 18th centuries with some of our German and Hungarian speaking congregations.

ON WEAVING AND MONEY -

"Weaving is a form of connectiveness," explains Earl Miller, the new head of the Stewardship Council, who believes that the ancient craft he is pursuing is symbolic of what the church must do to renew itself. Just as different threads and colors come together to form a whole, "so must we reconnect the church," Miller suggests. And money, he suspects, is one issue that divides. "We need to rebuild trust between congregations and their leaders and the larger church as to how the resources are spent," he says.

Miller does not see his role in stewardship as simply one of trying to raise the dollars. "Stewardship has a faith grounding," he explains. "As we are created in God's image, we must try and emulate God. As God is a giver, so we can not reach our full potential until we also become givers." Miller says he likes the imagery of open hands, "not only to receive God's blessing, but because a clenched hand signifies greed and an unwillingness to share."

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CHRISTMAS IN JUNE? - Not really, but **Church of the Beatitudes UCC** in **Phoenix** will broadcast its Christmas Eve service over ABC-TV. Since local stations have the option whether to pick up the service, it is important that UCC churches make their wishes known now. If there is a local ABC channel in your community, please call or write the program director asking the station to carry the service.

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

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OPEN AND AFFIRMING: SOME QUESTIONS - When a local church considers whether to become open and affirming of persons who are gay or lesbian, three questions get asked over and over again.

1. Do we have to change the constitution of the church? No. Church constitutions generally do not recognize any particular group but offer membership to all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord.

2. Aren't we already an open congregation? Why do we need a statement? Many churches have discriminated against gay and lesbian persons and taught that homosexuality is a sinful lifestyle. This has been so common among churches that many people feel it is important and compassionate for churches to state specifically that they are open to gay and lesbian people.

3. Does being "affirming" mean I support people engaging in sexual behaviors that I find offensive? No. No one is talking about affirming any particular behaviors or lifestyles (no more than affirming heterosexual persons would mean endorsing all of their lifestyles or behaviors). To affirm a homosexual person is simply to recognize that such a person's normal orientation is homosexual and to accept him/her for the person he/she is.

- *Our thanks to Mt. Sinai (N.Y.) Congregational UCC.*

LIFT YOUR VOICES HIGH - First Plymouth Congregational UCC of Lincoln, Neb., is not quite as large as England's famed Coventry Cathedral, so Plymouth's choir may have to sing a little more *fortissimo* when they perform there this June. The church's choir and brass ensemble are the only American group to be afforded a solo concert at the 11th Annual International Church Music Festival, June 24-July 4.

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AND THE WINNER IS... - The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries' *Created in God's Image: A Human Sexuality Program for Ministry and Mission* has received an award from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. In the forward to the 10 session curriculum, Homeland Board Executive Vice President Thomas E. Dipko writes: "If the degree of attention given to sex in our culture were a guarantee of our understanding of human sexuality, the publication of *Created in God's Image* would be unnecessary."

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TRY BEFORE YOU BUY - The best way to satisfy your curiosity about the new UCC *Hymnal*, out in 1995, is to attend a hymnal workshop. Coming to your conference soon is a specially trained team of church musicians who will introduce the hymnal in daylong workshops. Enlivened by audio and visual aids, the sessions will feature not only plenty of time for singing and questions and answers but also tips on how to use the new hymnal in worship. Anyone can attend these workshops. Contact your conference or association office for dates and locations.

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